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ABSTRACT

Federal education policy preferences of the Reagan Administration include both procedural and substantive elements. The overarching procedural policy is devolution--the transfer of the authority and responsibility for education policy and program development from the federal to state and local levels. Federal activities intended to advance devolution are decentralization, deregulation, and diminution. Decentralization advances devolution by formally transferring the authority for implementation of federal programs, but not the programs themselves, from federal agencies to state and local education agencies. Decentralization occurred with the enactment of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA) that established the block grant programs. Deregulation was achieved by constrained enforcement and revoking of regulations. Diminution was accomplished through rescissions and reductions in the federal education budget. Evidence to demonstrate the impact of these factors on state and local agencies is focused on effects that are symbolic, organizational, environmental, substantive, or procedural. Documentation sources include official governmental publications, periodical coverage of federal and state educational policy, publications of policy analysts and agencies, and research studies. Appended are 33 references. (MLF)

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The Effects of Federal Education Policy Changes on Policy and Program Development in State and Local Education Agencies

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March 1986

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Prefatory Note

The authors have been documenting accurately and predicting (with mixed success) the changes in federal educational policy that have occurred since President Reagan assumed office in January 1981. As the level of activity in educational policy has switched from Washington to the states, the authors have extended their efforts to include the effects of federal education policy changes on policy and program development in state and local education agencies. Sources for the documentation have been (a) official governmental publications, (b) periodical coverage of federal and state educational policy by the general and educational press, (c) publications of policy analysts and agencies, and (d) research studies of effects of federal education policy on state and local education agencies.

During the 1985-86 academic year, we will be issuing several other occasional papers that will examine:

- The significance and permanence of changes in federal educational policy, 1980-1988; (January 1986: currently available)
- Public support levels for the educational policy preferences of the Reagan administration;
- The comparative range of educational policy options under consideration prior to and after 1980.

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Introduction

Significant and enduring changes in federal education policy have occurred during the Reagan administration. In contrast to the preceding two decades, procedural and substantive policy shifts, achieved and underway, reflect a different view of the role of the federal government in education and the purposes and processes of schooling. The cornerstone of this new federalism in education is devolution, i.e., the transfer of the authority and initiative for educational policy and program development from the federal to state and local levels.

The Reagan administration has been clear, consistent, and persistent in communicating its policy preferences. For example, President Reagan observed:

> American schools don't need vast new sums of money as much as they need a few fundamental reforms.... We must restore parents and state and local governments to their rightful place in the educational process. Education begins at home, where it is a parental right and responsibility. Decisions about discipline, curriculum, and academic standards - the factors that make a school good or bad - shouldn't be made by people in Washington. They should be made at the local level by parents, teachers, and administrators in their own communities. (Reagan, 1984, pp. 14-15)

Can the effects of these federal education policy preferences on policy and program development in state and local education agencies be identified?

If so, what is their magnitude? Our intent in this paper is to provide evidence in support of two arguments:

1. Wide ranging educational policy changes are evident in (a) state and local responses to federal actions supporting devolution and (b) state-level policy activities in education;
2. These educational policy changes have effectively moved the arena of policy activity from Washington to the states.

Before turning to the evidence in support of these arguments, however, a brief review of state policy and program development activities prior to 1981 provides a framework for understanding the magnitude of the changes.

Retrospective

The activist federal posture of the two decades preceding the 1981 election did not reduce the policy activities of state education agencies (SEAs). On the contrary, while concerns were raised about the "unintended effects" of federal programs and policies (i.e., administrative burdens, undue federal influence, budgetary encroachment), the era of federal involvement in education facilitated the growth, capacity, and influence of SEAs. SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs) were pressed to expand their activities to meet the responsibilities of the federal categorical programs. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) focused the attention of SEAs and LEAs on educationally disadvantaged students and program improvement. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA, PL 94-142) triggered the implementation of procedures and programs to provide services to handicapped students.

School improvement activities were advanced through such federal programs as the National Diffusion Network and the State Capacity Building Program. Thus, while, the impetus for educational reform originated in Washington, it was accompanied by an expansion in SEA capacity and functions, e.g.:

- SEA Capacity
  - increased staff size (e.g., program administrators and staff were needed to coordinate the federal categorical programs);
  - increased staff diversity (e.g., lawyers, psychologists, program evaluators, and others were needed to provide the technical expertise to implement the federal categorical programs);
  - expanded staff responsibility (e.g., ESEA Title V provided incentives and support for SEA staff development in school improvement and dissemination).
- SEA Functions
  - expanded authority over LEAs due to the monitoring and reporting requirements of the federal programs;
  - expanded roles in educational program development due to the evaluation and technical assistance requirements of the federal programs;
  - increased activity in response to an intensified concern for accountability, (e.g., by 1980, thirty states had enacted student minimum competency testing legislation).

In summary, as reported by the School Finance Project:

> Federal programmatic involvement has made a difference in SEA capacity and functions, services for special needs students, LEA organization and administration, and school staffing and services. Even though there is substantial variability in state and local administration of specific program provisions, federal influence upon SEAs and local educational practices is very much evident. (Kutner, Addison, Hutner, and Sherman, 1984, p. 84)

However, the expanded functions and increased activities were restricted to the education community. State legislators, governors, and boards of education saw minimal political advantage to involvement in federal education policy (Kutner, et al., 1984, p. 54). That is the backdrop against which the magnitude of the effects of current federal education policy changes should be assessed.

Devolution

Federal education policy preferences of the Reagan administration include both procedural and substantive elements. The overarching procedural policy preference is devolution, i.e., the transfer of the authority and responsibility for educational policy and program development from the federal to state and local levels. The administration's definition of an appropriate role for the federal government is reflected in this policy preference. The consequence of devolution for federal policy and programs in education is the maintenance of a visible presence without operational responsibilities by offering advice, counsel, support, encouragement, and

exhortation to those who have operational responsibility - parents, local communities, and state governments.

The Tactics of Devolution

Federal activities intended to advance devolution are decentralization, deregulation, and diminution.

Decentralization. This tactic advances devolution by formally transferring the authority for implementation of federal programs, but not the programs themselves, from federal agencies to SEAs and LEAs. The administration's key achievement in this area was the enactment of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA), which established the block grant program. Chapter 1 of ECIA replaced Title I of ESEA. Chapter 2 of ECIA consolidated thirty-eight categorical programs authorized through ESEA and other programs into the block grant program. The congressional intent of ECIA as specified in the preamble is as follows:

> To continue to provide financial assistance to state and local education agencies to meet the special needs of educationally deprived children ... but to do so in a manner which will eliminate burdensome, unnecessary, and unproductive paperwork and free the schools of unnecessary federal supervision, direction, and control.... [Federal assistance] will be more effective if education officials, principals, teachers, and supporting personnel are freed from overly prescriptive regulations and administrative burdens which are not necessary for fiscal accountability and make no contribution to the instructional program.

Chapter 2 contains three broad categories of program activities, i.e.: Subchapter A - Basic Skills Development; Subchapter B - Educational Improvement and Support Services; Subchapter C - Special Projects, e.g., training and advisory services under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, using public education facilities as community centers, implementing special education programs, and preparing students for employment.

Deregulation. Eliminating federal regulations formally reduces federal intrusiveness in and control over the implementation of federal education programs and policies. Deregulation was achieved in two ways. First, enforcement was constrained, e.g.:

- preventing the Department's Office of Civil Rights from using Title VI to ensure bilingual education;
- limiting involvement in cases previously pressed by the federal government ranging from dress codes to Title IX regulations, to desegregation.

Second, regulations were revoked. Secretary Bell announced the revocation of thirty sets of rules governing nineteen block grant programs. Within ED every program area was instructed to review its regulations and propose alternatives if they went beyond the specific mandate of the legislation. Deregulation moved the sense of accountability to the state level and, contextually, reversed support for the interventionist position.

Diminution. Reducing federal fiscal support for education programs and policies forces other levels of government to consider alternative roles and responsibilities in support of these programs. Diminution was

accomplished through rescissions and reductions in the federal education budget. The Congressional Research Service (1984) reported that while total funding for ED has increased by 24.8 percent from FY 1980 through FY 1985, after adjusting for inflation, actual purchasing power has been reduced by 12 percent. The greatest decrease was 34 percent for the education block grant without adjusting for inflation and 53.5 percent after adjusting for inflation. The budget cuts accompanying the block grant took part in two stages:

> First, the programs proposed to be consolidated in the Reagan administration's FY 1982 budget received rescissions of approximately 25 percent, revising FY 1981 outlays downward. Second, the FY 1982 budget authority was reduced below the FY 1981 rescission request for the consolidated merger. (Verstegen, 1984, p. 293)

In proposing the block grant and the accompanying reduction in aid, Reagan stated that:

1. These reductions would not impact disproportionately on specific population groups or areas of the country;
2. The poor were to be protected from the reductions by a "safety net";
3. The reductions would be offset by administrative savings;
4. The reductions would be offset by increased local control that would target programs more effectively to areas of need;
5. Block grants would transfer responsibility for education back

to states and localities.

(Verstegen, 1984, p. 291)

Diminution moved the responsibility for fiscal support to the state level and, contextually, established the expectation for less at the federal level.

The Effects of Devolution

Decentralization, deregulation, and diminution are the tools for achieving devolution. The search for evidence to demonstrate the impact of these tools on state and local education agencies needs to focus on several areas. Changes in federal education policy may signal to state and local policy makers that modifications have occurred in the relationships between and among governmental levels. That is, some effects may be symbolic. Specific federal actions may trigger modifications in staff, functions, or programs in state and local education agencies, i.e., some effects may be organizational. Federal policy shifts may modify the policy process at the state and local levels by altering the political advantage that may accrue to policy actors, i.e., some effects may be environmental. State and local policy makers may modify reform initiatives or implementation of federal programs to respond to the federal education agenda, i.e., some effects may be substantive. Finally, federal actions may prompt state and local policymakers to adopt modified definitions and strategies for school improvement, i.e., some effects may be procedural.

The search for state and local effects of federal actions in support of devolution will be focused on the following categories:

- Symbolic effects: a sense that the era of close federal inspection is ending;
- Organizational effects: structural and programmatic modifications in SEAs;
- Environmental effects: politicalization of state educational policy development;
- Substantive effects: type of reform or improvement initiatives;
- Procedural effects: definitions of improvement and implementation tactics.

Symbolic effects. A widespread sentiment exists that the era of close federal inspection in education policy has ended. The establishment of the education block grant represented the key achievement for popularizing and sustaining the image of less government involvement in education. The symbolic impact of the block grant was extensive because it represented:

1. a necessary precondition of the new federalism;
2. the dismantlement of the specific, categorical programs that were the backbone of the old federalism;
3. the removal of the necessity for monitoring and evaluating;
4. the formal transfer of leadership and program management responsibilities from federal to state and local levels.

Thus, despite its limited scope, the block grant created the impression of less federal control and increased state control over education. For example:

Program officials in seven states, and gubernatorial staff in

five states, said the education block grant gave them more flexibility than prior categorical programs. In addition, education program officials in ten states believed that education block grant requirements were less burdensome than those of the prior categorical programs. Local school districts also perceived block grants to be more flexible and less burdensome. Large districts saw the block grant as even more flexible and less burdensome than did smaller districts. (GAO, 1984, p. 53)

The Reagan administration has been successful in managing symbols. While neither the block grant nor deregulation can be portrayed as comprehensive means of shifting the primary policy development role from the federal to state and local levels, they can be portrayed as necessary imagers of the new federalism in education.

Organizational effects. In a study of the effects of the education block grant, GAO (1984) noted that in five of the thirteen states studied SEAs made organizational changes through consolidation of program offices. Nine states reduced administrative staff. For example:

Before the block grant, Florida's categorical programs were administered by various bureaus of the state's Department of Education, Division of Public Schools. The block grant enabled the state to organize and administer the block grant program under one bureau, which, according to state officials allowed for a reduction in administrative personnel. Also, Texas disbanded two specific offices and state officials reported that this allowed

emphasis to be placed on broader educational objectives. The Vermont Department of Education streamlined its organization and consolidated many programs. The number of divisions in the department was reduced from seven to three. (GAO, 1984, pp. 25-26)

In a study of the effects of cutbacks, consolidation, and deregulation in California, Nevada, and Utah, Hood (1982) noted:

> Federal cuts have hurt all three state departments of education, mainly because a large portion of their staff is supported by federal funding.... (p. 8)

The block grant and deregulation were intended to shift accountability to state and local levels and reduce paperwork and program monitoring burdens. Recent research studies reported mixed findings in this regard. In the GAO (1984) study decreased monitoring, data collection, and record keeping were reported. However, officials in eleven of the thirteen states indicated that additional data would be useful:

> The types of additional data considered most useful were those relating to quality of services delivered and measures of program effectiveness. State officials said that the major barriers to increased data collection may include the belief that the collection effort would be a burden to LEAs, the need for additional staff and/or resources at the state level, and measurement difficulties in defining or obtaining information. (GAO, 1984, p. 32)

Kyle (1983) and Hastings and Bartell (1983) observed less reduction in

record keeping. Corbett, Rossman, and Dawson (1984) argued that contextual variations in the administration of ECIA affected paperwork reductions.

> Four districts [of the twelve studied] were in a state where SEA officials expressed serious concerns that future federal audits and evaluations would require more documentation than the minimal amount specified in the ECIA legislation. For this reason, they kept the same procedure for applying for funds, record keeping, and evaluation that had been used previously. (Corbett, Rossman, and Dawson, 1984, p. 347)

Cutbacks in federal education funding, consolidation, and deregulation combine in ways that trigger broad organizational effects.

> The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act is being introduced at a time when state funding and revenue systems are changing. State educational agencies are contracting and reorganizing in response to fiscal pressures and changing missions, and the programs that they administer are being subjected to more intensive scrutiny by other governmental bodies than in the past. These factors affect the states' responses to the ECIA just as the act itself — as part of the new federalism — affects both the broader context for response and the states' direct responses to its provisions. (Darling-Hammond and Marks, 1983, p. 35)

Hood (1982) noted:

> Although cuts in federal education funds represent less of a loss in total budget to local education agencies, there are massive

differences among the nearly 1,100 LEAs in these three states in degree of impact. For many urban school districts, the cuts in compensatory education, impact aid, Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), and other federal programs have represented relatively large losses. In other districts, federal cuts have resulted in losses of only 1 or 2 percent of the total budget and sometimes less. (p. 8)

In summary, the organizational effects of federal actions in support of devolution can be documented:

- Some SEAs have decreased staff in response to reduced federal funds and program consolidation, simultaneously reducing their capacity to provide leadership in school improvement and reducing or eliminating the resource slack necessary to foster innovations.
- While the federal intent of ECIA is to reduce paperwork and administrative burden, minimal evidence exists that this reduction has occurred. Instead, SEAs continue to require extensive reporting from LEAs either for their own monitoring purposes or due to uncertainty about future federal accounting requirements.
- ECIA, deregulation, and diminution have been introduced without any explicit attention to the variability in SEAs and LEAs that existed before the policy changes. Consequently, the organizational effects, positive and negative, for SEAs and LEAs are

highly variable and dependent not on the policy change but on pre-existent state and local variables.

Environmental effects. The ECIA has contributed to the politicalization of educational policy development at the state level. Governors and state legislators have become more involved in the implementation of federal programs at the state level due, in part to the requirements of ECIA. For example, ECIA requires the formation of a state advisory committee (SAC) with responsibilities for making recommendations regarding the state funding distribution formula and the allocation of discretionary fuds as well as reviewing evaluations of local programs. Typically, governors, who had been uninvolved in the administration or implementation of the antecedent Title I programs, appoint members to this state-wide committee. According to GAO (1984):

> The mandated role of governors and legislators in the SAC and the limited increase in flexibility brought about by the consolidation of education categorical programs has contributed to the increased role of some governors and a majority of legislatures. (p. 54)

On the other hand, ECIA requirements have reduced the necessity of parent and community involvement at the local level. ESEA Title I required local parent advisory groups comprised of community members whose children participated in Title I programs. ECIA only requires that LEAs provide assurances in their applications that parents, administrators, and teachers have been consulted about the proposed programs. Mechanisms for broadly

based community involvement in decision making about Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 programs are unspecified. Henderson (1983) noted multiple problems with local efforts to involve the community:

> Time and again in this study we see that public involvement becomes constituency involvement, and that the constituents of officials are other officials, not the public or parents. SEAs meet public notification requirements by sending notices to county or local superintendents' offices. Local districts provide for "systematic consultation" of parents and teachers by asking the school board to ratify their Chapter 2 applications. (Henderson, 1983, p. 36)

The effectiveness of state level mechanisms for securing community involvement, including executive or legislative hearings, has also been questioned:

> Fifty-two percent of the interest groups in our survey that had some knowledge of the education block grant said they attended or testified at either executive or legislative hearings. While those that gave an opinion were more satisfied than dissatisfied with the amount of advance notice, the time and location of hearings, and the amount of time allotted for testimony, 30 percent were satisfied with the amount of information, such as draft plans, available before hearings and 49 percent were dissatisfied. Also, 41 percent were dissatisfied with the timing of hearings relative to states' allocation decision making processes. (GAO, 1984, p. 48)

In summary, evidence of environmental effects at the state and local levels of federal actions in support of devolution can be documented:

- Increased involvement of governors and legislatures in decision making about implementation of federal programs at the state level is apparent. This represents a significant change in light of the lack of involvement in previous federal education policy and programs.
- Community groups do not have the same level of political power as was the case under the antecedent programs. In some communities, even the decreased requirement of participation has not been effectively implemented.

Substantive effects. The antecedent categorical programs targeted state and local activities on equity issues, programs for educationally disadvantaged students, and school improvement initiatives. However, shifts in state and local educational priorities and distribution of block grant funds provide evidence of substantive changes in the implementation of federal educational programs.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted a survey of LEAs to determine how block grant funds were being spent (AASA, 1984). According to that survey, 88 percent of the school districts were spending money for instructional materials and school library resources at an average amount per school district of $15,073. Expenditures were made primarily for equipment and computer hardware and software. Approximately 29.6 percent of the schools were spending an average of $3605 of Chapter 2

funds to improve local educational practices. The majority of the previous categorical programs were not being funded at all by most school districts; 4-5% of the districts were funding those programs at low levels. The largest program included in the block grant, the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), was intended to support desegregation activities. 94.3 percent of the districts surveyed were not funding ESAA. The 5.7 percent who were, were allocating an average of $871. 95.3 percent of the LEAs surveyed were not funding desegregation training and advisory services; those that were, were allocating an average of $94. While a recent study by SRI International indicated that the types of programs funded through Chapter 2 have broadened since its implementation, the emphasis continues to be on purchasing computers and material:

> Still, 75 percent of districts surveyed spent some $99 million on computers in 1984-85. In other areas, 67 percent of the districts spent $97 million to support libraries and "media centers"; 25 percent spent $30 million on curriculum or program development; 25 percent spent $29 million on staff development; 17 percent spent $27 million on instructional services, and another 17 percent spent $25 million on student support services. (Hertling, 1986, p. 8).

Kyle (1983) offered two interpretations for this obvious shift in priorities in the implementation of federal programs:

> One is that people are uncertain about the stability of the amounts of federal money and even the continuation of Chapter 2.

> In the face of similar uncertainties, local educators have learned that equipment once purchased remains whether the funds do or not; personnel have to be refunded each year. Thus, purchasing computers and other instructional materials offers protections against the whims of legislators. A second view is that Chapter 2 has provided the extra money and flexibility needed to advance districts' already existing interest in computers. (Kyle, 1983, p. 12)

In the study of the effects of cutbacks, consolidation, and deregulation on California, Nevada, and Utah, Hood (1982, p. 7) observed that, "in general, the emphasis has been placed on maintaining basic educational services at the cost of reducing or eliminating discretionary programs."

Another way to identify substantive effects is to analyze the distribution of the block grant funds. "States sustaining the greatest reductions as a result of the merger of antecedent programs into a block grant (FY 1980 to FY 1982) generally were the same states that had large numbers of poor children" (Verstegen, 1984, p. 294). Additionally, "states that had high numbers of minority group children and were receiving grants under ESAA sustained the largest losses of aid " (Verstegen, 1984, p. 296). In concluding her study, Verstegen (1984, p. 302) noted:

> Finally, ECIA, Chapter 2, was to have included a reduction in aid that would not disproportionately impact any specific population group or area of the country; the poor were to be protected from these reductions by a "safety net." The data produced by this

study showed that the reductions in aid for the consolidation began in FY 1981. From FY 1980, the last year prior to the consolidation strategy, to FY 1982, the amount of aid from antecedent programs to the Education Block Grant was decreased by approximately 38%. These reductions fell disproportionately on the Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes Areas of the country, and on poor and minority children located mainly in urban schools undergoing desegregation.

In summary, evidence of the substantive effects of federal actions in support of devolution can be documented:

- Rather than focusing initiatives at the state level on equity and multiple methods of school improvement, the implementation of the education block grant has emphasized the purchase of equipment, primarily computer hardware and software.
- The big winners under the categorical grant programs are the big losers under the block grant program, i.e., low SES and minority students and districts that were heavily involved in the adoption and implementation of innovations.

Procedural effects. Faced with decentralization, deregulation, and diminution, state and local education agencies are focusing less on R&D, dissemination of innovations, and program evaluation. Program consolidation and decreased federal funds in conjunction with state-level cutbacks have diverted attention from the processes of school improvement. In California, Nevada, and Utah, Hood (1982) observed:

> Research, planning, staff development, technical assistance, information services, and even public information services have been affected because such activities do not immediately and directly affect classroom teaching. (p. 67)

Hood (1982) also noted:

> In all three states, the majority of the state portion of ECIA Chapter 2 money will not be directed to specific staff development efforts. Nevada has no specific state-level staff development plans for the money. Utah will use some of its Chapter 2 money for consultant salaries in the areas of reading, mathematics, social studies, and gifted and talented. In California, $300,000 of the state portion will be distributed among seven federal teacher centers as partial support while they seek continuing financial support from other sources. (p. 8)

Additionally, Gray, Cauley, and Smith (1982) reported decreased evaluation activities in SEAs resulting from budget reductions:

> What we have seen is a consolidation of staff in terms of the organization, a modest reduction in terms of numbers, and a subsequent broadening of responsibilities. The potential result of these changes is that staff will have less time to spend with their clients and, therefore, their contact will be more superficial than before. This change in the nature of the relationship between SEA evaluators (both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) and their clients is described in terms of a move away from program

evaluation and thorough program monitoring to more leadership, technical assistance, and cost accounting as monitoring. (pp. 12-13)

In summary, evidence of procedural effects of state and local responses to federal action to advance devolution can be documented:

- LEAs and SEAs are focusing less on the key components of the school improvement process, i.e., R&D, dissemination of innovations, and program evaluation.

Substantive Policy Preferences

In addition to devolution, a set of specific, substantive policy preferences reflect this administration's views of school improvement priorities and strategies. A complete analysis of state effects, then, needs to assess the extent to which educational policy activity at the state and local level reflects, complements, or contradicts substantive shifts in the federal education agenda.

The Federal Agenda for School Improvement

Compiling an agenda of the substantive policy preferences of the Reagan administration is not difficult. Radio messages by the President, State of the Union addresses, remarks by Secretary Bennett and others within the Department of Education (ED) all reflect the same policy positions, i.e.:

1. Institutional Competition: breaking the monopoly of the public school to stimulate excellent performance;

2. Individual Competition: recognizing excellence to stimulate excellence;
3. Performance Standards: increasing minimum standards for teachers and students;
4. Focus on Content: emphasis on basics to insure performance in critical instructional areas;
5. Parental Choice: parental control over what, where, and how their children will learn;
6. Character: strengthening traditional values in schools; (Clark and Astuto, 1986)

State Policy Activity and the Federal Agenda

Do educational policy activities in the states reflect an increased responsiveness to local educational needs; are the states being responsive to the federal bully pulpit, to federal efforts to influence educational reform through rhetoric and exhortation?

State initiatives have been reported in the general and education press and efforts have been made to document those initiatives (Kirst, 1986; Odden, 1985; Rosenthal and Fuhrman, 1981). By assessing these state initiatives against the substantive, federal educational policy preferences, the effects of federal education policy changes are further clarified.

Institutional competition. Federal activities in support of institutional competition include tuition tax credits, vouchers, school awards

programs, and monitoring of state educational achievement. The most significant activity of the past year in this area was the approval by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) of a plan to conduct cross-state assessments of policies and educational progress of students and to report those findings annually beginning in 1987. The initial list of indicators of cross-state comparisons include three categories: educational outcomes, educational context, and educational policies and practices. In supporting the plan, Bill Honig of California observed that "part of the purpose is not just the ranking of states.... We've got to agree here where we're going to move to improve this country" (Sirkin, 1985, p. 14). Jerry L. Evans of Idaho indicated that "we are going to have cross-state comparisons, so we might as well see that it's done fairly" (Sirkin, 1985, p. 15).

Individually, thirty-seven states have approved statewide assessment programs (Changing Course, February 6, 1985, p. 11). The Illinois Education Reform and Finance Act of 1985 includes a provision for report cards for schools (Pipho, 1985, p. 101). In Massachusetts, the 1985 education reform legislation requires local school boards to provide extensive data to the state board which will make awards to schools for superior or improved performance (Pipho, 1985, p. 175). California implemented the first "accountability program" which reviews districts on a school-by-school basis relative to five categories of five-year goals, i.e., enrollment, test scores, performance of the college bound, dropout and attendance rates, extracurricular programs, homework, and writing

assignments (Changing Course, February 6, 1985, p. 13). Additionally, as discussed in detail below, actions to increase parental choice such as vouchers or tuition tax credits or open enrollment policies have been introduced in a number of states.

In developing institutional competition initiatives, concerns are raised about fairness, the appropriateness of measures of effectiveness, and institutional factors that might account for differences. No concerns are raised about the effectiveness and appropriateness of competition as a tool for institutional improvement. This federal policy preference taps into distinctly American conventional wisdom. Governors and legislators seem comfortable in adopting the notion of competition in the marketplace to effect school improvement needs.

Individual competition. A survey of state initiatives identified numerous programs that foster competition among teachers and among students (Changing Course, February 6, 1985). Fourteen states have adopted some form of performance - based salary system for teachers. California has implemented an instructional improvement program in which teachers can receive up to $2000 grants. Georgia has established a Scholar Program for High School Seniors based on grades, attendance, test scores, and extra-curricular activity. West Virginia, Tennessee, Michigan, and Kentucky approved summer institutes for gifted students. New Jersey established a vocational awards program to recognize the state's most successful placement programs. South Carolina established a policy that vocational education programs should achieve a fifty percent job placement rate or be

discontinued. South Dakota approved the Superior Scholars Program that would award national merit semi-finalists up to $2000 per year for higher education.

As with institutional competition, individual competition has captured the attention of state policy makers as a mechanism for improving teachers and increasing student achievement.

Performance standards. From a quantitative point of view, there has been more state activity in support of this federal policy preference than any of the others. States have increased performance standards relative to teacher and administrator certification, student promotion and graduation, and college entrance.

According to the survey of state education initiatives (Changing Course, February 6, 1985), twenty-nine states established teacher competency testing requirements. A variety of testing requirements have been approved including basic skills tests (e.g., California, Delaware, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oregon), and both basic skills and subject area tests (e.g., New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia). States have mandated on-the-job assessments of new teachers (e.g., Georgia), internships (e.g., Louisiana, Pennsylvania), and beginning teacher assistance programs (e.g., Oklahoma). Administrator certification initiatives include the establishment of academies (e.g., Missouri, Mississippi, Tennessee), assessment centers (e.g., Alaska, South Carolina), and the development of a mandated quality assurance program (i.e., North Carolina).

Forty-three states raised high school graduation requirements. These

increased requirements include additional credit hours (e.g., Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky) and additional required courses (e.g., Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois). Fifteen states required exit exams (e.g., Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina) and eight required promotional gates tests (e.g., Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina).

Finally, seventeen states raised college admission requirements. These increased requirements included additional credit hours (e.g., Kentucky), additional required courses (e.g., Arizona, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts), and increased grade point averages (e.g., Idaho).

The extensive activity in establishing or increasing performance standards is consistent with the traditional inspectorial role of SEAs as well as the traditional standard setting roles of both SEAs and state legislatures.

Focus on content. The increased high school graduation requirements enacted address the recommended Five New Basics of A Nation at Risk, i.e., English, math, science, social studies, computers. A variety of additional state initiatives reflect a focus on content similar to the federal policy preference (Changing Course, February 6, 1985). For example, Iowa provided $25 grants for each student enrolled in advanced math or science and $50 for those enrolled in first year foreign language courses. In Kentucky, 70 percent of the school day in K-8 and 60 percent of the school day in high school is to be devoted to basic skills. Maine's statewide assessment program requires all students in grades four, eight, and eleven to take

yearly tests in reading, writing, and math. Michigan requires that all students should have at least one semester of computer literacy; incentive grants are provided to high schools that tighten curricula and offer foreign language and gifted programs. Nebraska established a scientist in residence program. Arizona made forgivable loans available for prospective math and science teachers and provided summer institutes and other programs to upgrade the skills of math and science teachers. Indiana approved $6 million for computer training for teachers and students.

State policy makers have responded to the content emphases delineated in A Nation at Risk and highlighted by remarks of both President Reagan and Secretary Bennett.

Parental choice. According to a survey conducted by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers various forms of tuition tax credits or vouchers were under consideration in at least thirteen legislatures (Currence, September 19, 1984). Representatives of the PTA indicated that:

> The battleground for those fighting public aid to private schools has shifted in the last year from the federal to the state level, and state affiliates of the PTA and other education groups now are concentrating their efforts on combating the private-aid proposals in state legislatures. (Currence, September 19, 1984, p. 1)

Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee has indicated that he would support public school vouchers:

> No amount of lecturing by governors or regulations from legislatures

> can improve public education as well as allowing parents to make marketplace choices.... It would straighten public education right up.... If no one buys Fords one year, the guy building them is fired and someone else is brought in to do the job.... A voucher plan would produce the same sort of changes in education. If the line is long outside one school, it must have something good to offer; if the line isn't long, it's going to have to make improvements if it wants to stay in business. (Toch, December 12, 1984, p. 1)

Arizona considered a tuition tax credit bill to allow parents to write off educational expenses at public and private schools. Tuition tax credit legislation was proposed in Idaho. The 1984 Massachusetts legislature proposed a constitutional amendment to allow state aid to private school students. Minnesota's governor proposed a public school voucher system for grades 11 and 12. South Dakota's governor proposed a "Family Option" to allow any family with children in high schools with enrollments under 50 to enroll students in an adjacent district, with the state paying tuition (Changing Course, February 6, 1985).

In addition to private school tuition tax credits, public and private school vouchers, and open enrollment policies, home schooling is another mechanism for increasing parental choice under consideration by state policy makers. Responding to pressure from Christian fundamentalist groups and citizen complaints about the public schools, legislators in Arkansas, New Mexico, Washington, and Wyoming adopted home schooling legislation. Other states are expected to consider similar legislation or to loosen home

schooling rules (Ranbom, 1985).

Additionally, sponsors of bills patterned after the federal Hatch Act are becoming active at the state level. This legislation, a mechanism for increasing parental choice in terms of the curriculum and teaching methods, would prohibit public schools from involving students in certain state sponsored programs of research or psychological testing without parental consent. Although introduced in at least eight states, sponsors acknowledge that passage is unlikely:

> Supporters point to their introduction this session as "a testing of the waters" in preparation for passage in future legislative sessions. Said Richard F. Davis, sponsor of a pupil protection bill in Delaware, "if we can't get it through this year, it will still be around next year." (Bridgman, 1985, p. 1)

Character. The definition of this federal policy preference includes: (1) strengthening traditional values in schools and (2) fostering student character including "such qualities as thoughtfulness, kindness, honesty, respect for the law, knowing right from wrong, respect for parents and teachers, diligence, self-sacrifice, hard work, fairness, self-discipline and love of country" (Hertling, 1985, June 12, p. 10).

In support of strengthening traditional values, the South Carolina Legislature required the Board to establish and enforce minimum standards of student conduct. In Idaho districts must develop a discipline policy and distribute it annually to students. Hawaii developed a statewide disciplinary code which defines offenses and actions to be taken. Colorado

mandated districts to adopt a discipline policy. The Pennsylvania governor began a campaign to increase parental involvement in attendance, homework, and discipline.

State policy makers have responded to the press to strengthen traditional values in school. This policy preference represents a broadly-shared sentiment, and state policy makers are disinclined and poorly positioned to resist lobbying efforts in this regard.

On the other hand, no evidence is available that indicates that state policy makers are responding to the federal policy preference of fostering student character, i.e., encouraging values education rather than value-neutral education. State policy makers may yet develop policies in response to this preference. Or, values education may be too volatile an issue, thus limiting potential state policy actions to exhortation.

Interpretation of State Education Policy Activity

Beyond the obvious notation that devolution and the substantive policy preferences of the Reagan administration have stimulated policy activities and actions at the state level, what characterizes this activity? There are at least four interpretations that we think help in understanding the effects to date:

1. Educational policy activity at the state level is not expanding the agenda of federal education policy preferences; nor is it generating policy options. Rather, state education policy is mirroring federal policy and consequently reinforcing the federal preferences in state policy options.

2. State-level actions employ the tools available to state legislatures and governors, i.e., setting standards and requirements for school personnel, students, and programs. These actions fit the federal agenda and the classic role of SEAs - monitoring, inspecting, enforcing minimum standards.
3. The state activity may be reinforcing federal preferences and traditional SEA roles, but it is expanding the actors that hold center stage in formulating policy. There is now, and will probably continue to be, political advantage to state elected officials to be active in education policy development.
4. The level of state activity is diverting attention from problems that will have to be faced ultimately in analyzing the effects of the flurry of policy initiatives: (a) increased discrepancy in the ability of states to respond to their needs, (b) impracticality of funding and enforcing the initiatives, and (c) centralization of local initiative at the state level.

Reinforcement of Federal Policy Preferences

The era of federal intervention in education, symbolized by ESEA and EHA, stimulated concomitant state-level activism. The federal categorical programs required program offices, administrators, and staff at the state level. Federal legislation, rules, and regulations required increased state-level monitoring activities. Federal reporting and monitoring requirements increased state activity in evaluation and R&D. Responsibilities for federal programs and the availability of federal funds

increased the influence of SEAs with LEAs. Thus, an interventionist federal posture contributed to to the growth and activity level of SEAs.

Similarly, the substantive federal policy preferences of that era, including equity issues, social and welfare concerns, and the common school, were accompanied by state-level policy activity consonant with those preferences. Requirements of the categorical programs broadened the focus of SEA activity to include not only monitoring and certifying but also expanded technical assistance in support of school improvement.

Devolution might be expected to produce a different effect; to increase the range of education policy preferences and options across states. To date that has not been the case. State education policy agendas, education legislation, and the range of policy options under consideration look the same from state-to-state; and they are consistent with the contemporary policy preferences in education in Washington. One might reasonably argue that devolution has produced more powerful state reinforcement of federal preferences since the consonance is born of state action rather than state response to federal action.

Whether this is a temporary phenomenon is arguable. A Nation at Risk was a document of consensus. The solutions proposed in Risk fitted state policy capabilities, i.e., standards adjustment. Evidence is available that the education preferences of the Reagan administration are popular with most people.[1] Many of the early policy initiatives could be proposed and implemented at low cost to the states. The second, third, and fourth rounds of policy consideration at the state level may stimulate more

debate, disagreement, and divergent actions.

But up to this point the picture is clear. The strongest link in the chain of progress toward the Reagan substantive agenda for educational reform is in the state legislatures and state houses.

Reinforcement of Traditional SEA Roles

SEAs have been preoccupied historically with monitoring, certifying and improving schools (Louis and Corwin, 1984). Prior to ESEA, SEAs were smaller and focused their activities on monitoring and certifying as the mechanisms for improving schools, i.e., they were regulatory agencies. After the enactment of ESEA and as a result of federal programs such as NDN and SCDP, SEAs became involved in school improvement activities focused on the adoption and implementation of innovations. In identifying how states are able to influence school improvement, Mitchell and Encarnation (1984) delineated seven mechanisms: (1) structural organization; (2) revenue generation; (3) resource allocation; (4) accreditation; (5) training and certification of personnel; (6) testing and assessment of school progress; (7) development and selection of school materials. Kirst (1984) observed that recent reform initiatives focus more closely on the last four.

Evidence to date indicates that effects such as the reduction in size of SEAs, program consolidation, and legislative activities focusing on performance standards, institutional and individual competition, and accountability have, at least in the short term, narrowed the functions of SEAs to include primarily monitoring and certifying. Possibly the short time frame during which the increased state activity has occurred explains

the current reliance on simple policy mechanisms.

Whether or not the longer range effect of devolution will be to reinforce traditional roles remains to be determined. Some states (e.g., California, Illinois, New York), building upon earlier initiatives, are already involved in more complex patterns of school improvement. The school improvement research supports the assertion that the process of school improvement is more complex than the simple process of modifying standards. The issue is the extent to which other states will advance beyond this rudimetary stage of monitoring and standard setting.

Expansion of Key Policy Actors

President Reagan discovered in the 1984 campaign that education policy is fun and rewarding from a national political point of view. Governors and state legislators are discovering that once the arena of activity is expanded beyond the foundation program for funding education, the same is true for them. The key actors are changing.

> The initial influential actors are legislators, governors, and business interests. The traditional education interest groups - teachers, administrators, and school boards - have been used primarily as consultants. Specific items have been modified to take account of their objections, but the overall strategy and the omnibus legislation have been developed by state-level actors. (Kirst, 1984, p. 191)

This modification in the actors who play key roles in state level policy making in education is having several effects:

- A bureaucracy of educational specialists attached directly to legislative committees and the governor's office is developing in states that relied previously on the educationist associations and the SEA for policy data.
- The demand for data relevant to policy options is increasing. The supply is short.
- Special interest groups outside the educationist lobby and beyond those interested traditionally in school finance and taxes are becoming more active in the formulation of educational policy.
- Governors and legislators are beginning to identify themselves with educational issues and programs.

New actors beget new problems, for example:

> SEAs are likely to support those aspects of school management programs that will receive public support even if these are not known to be most effective for reaching official goals. Technical assistance and related programs supported on research evidence are not especially popular at the policy level - either in Washington or in the state legislatures. Legislators (and sometimes senior state agency staff) do not necessarily understand the need for technical assistance to support local change efforts. (Louis and Corwin, 1984, p. 180)

But they may also provide a fulcrum on which a new era of support for education could be built. At the least, one can argue that a form of harmony has been returned to the arena of education policy. Politicians

who are functioning at the level where education is a big ticket item are in a position to affect critically the direction of that policy. Politicians functioning at the federal level, where educational policy is almost invisible in the press of national and international priorities, find little reason to invest themselves in the area.

Emergent Areas of Policy Concern

A Nation Responds sounded a euphoric interpretation of the heightened policy activity at the state level. Plaudits for increased activity and increased funding should not be allowed to mask honest concerns surrounding the educational effects of devolution. Firstly, devolution increases the variability among the states relative to political influence systems, the ability and willingness to finance education, and local norms and values about education. In describing this variability, Elmore (1984) observed:

> First, states are not guaranteed a role in education simply because they exist as political jurisdictions. States will influence the way education is provided to the degree that state policy makers seek, and the public rewards, the use of education as a means of delivering benefits. Second, states, because they vary so widely in their economic and political makeup, will also vary widely in the degree to which they use education as a means of delivering benefits to their citizens. (p. 134)

The unintended derivative effect of devolution is to accentuate the discrepancy among the states in terms of their ability and willingness to respond to their educational needs. Devolution transfers the authority for

policy and program development from the federal to the state level. While the present overall pattern suggests that the states are exploding with activity, in fact, the level of state activity fits roughly the contextual features of the state. Comprehensive school improvement programs are emerging only in the states that have the contextual conditions to support them. Over a relatively short time period that should give rise to concern for a national safety net to protect minimal educational quality levels in all states.

Many of the first round of state initiatives are open to attack because they seem to transfer program responsibility to the local level without needed financial support, demand performance levels that are unattainable (consequently, establishing rules that are unenforceable), and require local responses that LEAs, and frequently management specialists, would classify as unproductive, e.g., cumbersome merit pay systems. All states that have been active have examples of one or more of the above. Some states may have key actions that fall in these categories. Some states are already embroiled in debates over where the money will come from. Others are attempting to untangle unfeasible or unrealistic policies and programs.

There has always been tension between LEAs and SEAs over the control of education. The federal role of the 1960-80 period masked some of that hostility. As the states attempt to play a more active role in intervention, monitoring, and evaluation, they will inevitably encounter resistance by LEAs. The excuse of blaming the federal bureaucracy will be

replaced with the inevitable conflicts of contiguous bureaucracies.

As we argued at the beginning of this paper, wide ranging education policy changes have occurred in a short time frame in response to the Reagan administration's press for devolution and modification of the substantive emphases in educational policy. What remains to be determined is:

1. Whether these changes will result in significant modifications of educational practice and achievement;
2. Whether these modifications, if they occur, will be positive or negative;
3. Whether it is possible to effect policy modifications of devolution and excellence while protecting access and equity.

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